



Most Reverend Richard J. Garcia, D.D.
Bishop of the Diocese of Monterey

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My Dear Friends in Christ,

As we conclude the Easter Season, I pray that we continue as a hope-filled people and that each of us desires to deepen our relationship with the Risen Christ. To respond to this call to conversion and to more closely conform ourselves to Christ, we rely on the help of the Holy Spirit. Last Sunday we celebrated the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles as a guide to them and to us to help us do as Jesus asked. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can examine ourselves and rededicate ourselves to do as Jesus commanded.

Just as all Christians must, the Church throughout the world and the Diocese of Monterey, specifically, is called to reflect on how well it follows the teachings of Christ, to identify areas where it can improve and to make changes to more faithfully follow Jesus. The sexual abuse of children by those ministering in the name of the Church is a sin against the rights of our precious young people. We must do all in our power to stop this abuse. We must take time to reflect on how well we are doing in working to eliminate this terrible human tragedy.

As has been widely reported in the media, the problem of sexual abuse of minors continues to challenge our society and the Catholic Church. In response to this, His Holiness Benedict XVI, recently stated that, "the church has a profound need to relearn penance, to accept purification, to learn on the one hand forgiveness but also the necessity of justice. And forgiveness is not a substitute for justice. We have to relearn these essentials: conversion, prayer and penance."

As your Bishop, I would like to take this opportunity to provide you with my reflection and report on how the Diocese of Monterey is doing in keeping its promise to protect our children.

I would like to begin by affirming that sexual misconduct by anyone ministering in the name of the Church is a grave sin against the human dignity of our children and young people. No child should have to suffer such abuse by anyone and most especially not by a priest or anyone associated with the Church. The Church should be a place of refuge for children to develop their relationship with God, to learn the faith, to celebrate the sacraments and to build a community that is safe and welcoming as a model for our secular communities.

I promise you, the faithful in this Diocese, that I will do my best to learn from the past and to recommit myself and all on my staff to ensure that no child under the care of the Diocese of Monterey is subjected to sexual abuse. To make this promise real, we continue to implement our Safe Environment Program that outlines appropriate ministerial boundaries with children, and we continue our zero tolerance policy regarding anyone associated with the Diocese of Monterey who has abused a child. Sr. Patricia Murtagh, our Chancellor is the director of this program. Under the zero tolerance policy, I promise to take swift action to protect children when a credible allegation is made that a priest, deacon, religious or lay

person may have abused a child. For example, in the case of the arrest of a priest in Salinas last year, I immediately removed his permission to function as a priest -- meaning that he is not permitted to celebrate the sacraments -- and prohibited him from having contact with minors. I also directed my staff to cooperate fully with law enforcement.

In accord with this policy, with the Charter for the Protection of Children and with my own concern for all of our precious children and young people, I would like to assure you that there is no priest or deacon in ministry in the Diocese of Monterey with a credible claim of sexual abuse of a child.

We are also taking steps to teach our children and young people about how to keep themselves safe and encourage them to report inappropriate behavior to a trusted adult. We also educate parents about the warning signs of abuse and what do if it appears that a child is being abused. As part of their ongoing development, we teach our priests, deacons and lay employees regarding child abuse and their responsibilities to report sexual abuse to law enforcement.

Under our Policy Against Sexual Misconduct, we conduct an investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct whether the allegation involves a priest, deacon, religious or lay person and take prompt remedial action to protect children and young people from abuse.

We conduct a criminal background check on all priests, deacons, religious and lay employees who a child would associate as a "safe" person. We also require each priest, deacon or religious who wishes to engage in ministry (even if it is only to preside at one mass or give one talk or retreat) in the Diocese of Monterey to provide a letter from his/her bishop or religious superior that he or she is in good standing and does not have an allegation of sexual misconduct in his or her background.

I hope and pray that there will never be another child abused by anyone especially anyone associated with the Catholic Church or most particularly with the Diocese of Monterey. However, if someone ministering in the Diocese of Monterey is found to have abused a child or if there is a credible claim of such abuse, I will take swift action to protect our precious children and young people.

Please continue to pray for the victims of sexual abuse, for all of our priests as we conclude this Year for Priests as well as our dedicated staff and volunteers. I pray for you always and I ask your prayers for me, your Bishop.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard J. Garcia".

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